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Mr Ges Smith
Headteacher
Jo Richardson Community School
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of Jo Richardson Community School

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 2017 with Vicky Linsley, Ofsted Inspector and Annie Gammon, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your team have continued to improve the opportunities for pupils and raise their aspirations.

In 2016 and 2017, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, made above-average progress across a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics. Your focus on teaching and learning, through the sharing of good practice and provision of accurate and reliable assessment information, enables pupils to make strong progress. This was identified as a key area for improvement at the last inspection. However, you recognise that there continues to be some unevenness between subjects, including some underperformance in geography.

Despite the high expectations that leaders have for all pupils, not enough pupils achieve the highest grades at GCSE, particularly the most able. Leaders acknowledge that some teachers are not providing the most able pupils with challenging activities to deepen their knowledge and understanding and achieve the highest grades.

School leaders have created a purposeful learning environment. Pupils take an active role in ensuring that they respect each other, staff and visitors. Pupils are well mannered and polite. Conduct around the school is good and this is reflected in the pride pupils take in their school. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online

survey are overwhelming in their praise. Staff 'go above and beyond' in their care for pupils and the help they give with ensuring academic progress. To quote one parent, 'JRCS is in a league of its own.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The single central record accurately records all the required pre-employment checks and meets statutory requirements. Regular safeguarding training for staff includes aspects such as preventing radicalisation and extremism, and the appropriate use of social media.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school and are confident that they will be listened to should they need to report a concern. Staff have a good local knowledge of potential problems within the community, and as a result, provide effective and timely support to pupils. Governors are mindful of their responsibilities regarding safeguarding and have ensured that they are up to date with the latest requirements.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to focus upon four lines of enquiry. We started by considering the progress that pupils make from their starting points, including disadvantaged pupils.
- In 2016 and 2017, pupils made above-average progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils made significantly better progress in 2017 than in 2016, and now exceed the progress of other pupils nationally. However, leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, achieve the highest GCSE grades.
- Since the previous inspection, you have developed an effective teaching approach to reinforce your high expectations for pupils' learning. Most teachers use information on pupils' progress to plan activities that match their needs. As a result, where activities are well matched to pupils' needs, pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and make good progress. Nevertheless, leaders are aware that in science and geography, there remains some inconsistency in how well lesson activities match the needs of the pupils. In these subjects the progress of pupils is less strong.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work evidenced the opportunities for extended writing across the curriculum. This is as a result of effective actions taken by school leaders to prioritise both reading and writing skills for pupils.
- We also agreed to look at how well the curriculum continues to meet pupils' needs. Currently, the numbers of pupils at key stage 4, who study a modern foreign language, is well below the national average. Consequently, pupils, particularly the most able, are not achieving strong GCSE outcomes across the range of English Baccalaureate subjects. Leaders acknowledge that there is a need to improve access to the English Baccalaureate subjects, particularly for the most able pupils.

- In 2016 and 2017, the achievement of students following academic courses in the sixth form did not match the excellent outcomes of those students studying work-related courses. We agreed to look at the actions taken by leaders to ensure that the most academically able pupils are able to flourish and excel in the sixth form.
- The school sixth form is part of the Southern Consortium and offers a wide range of courses. Visits to sixth-form classrooms showed teachers' skilful questioning in developing students' skills, knowledge and understanding. For example, during the inspection, students were observed confidently analysing texts and applying their learning to an exam question about Mussolini's power. Effective questioning by the teacher clarified any misconceptions and enabled the students to move on swiftly with their learning. Scrutiny of students' work confirms that students make good progress over time across a range of subjects.
- Sixth-form students greatly value the breadth of experience they receive, which includes trips to Nicaragua, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and charitable fund-raising. Students also expressed appreciation of the effective mentoring, support and guidance they have received about future choices. This includes information about apprenticeships alongside university routes.
- Finally, we focused on how effectively leaders have been in reducing absence for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In 2016, the persistent absence for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, and those who are disadvantaged, was higher than the national average.
- Leaders maintain a sharp focus on addressing high absence rates. Effective support ensures that pupils and their families attend school more regularly. As a result, there has been some improvement in the attendance rates for both disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Nevertheless, some parents require more encouragement to ensure that their children attend school more often.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching is consistently effective in challenging pupils to excel, particularly the most able, so that they achieve the highest grades in their GCSE examinations.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barking and Dagenham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection inspectors:

- visited classrooms to observe learning jointly with senior leaders
- scrutinised pupils' work and discussed pupils' learning with them
- listened to pupils read who are receiving additional support through the school's catch-up programme
- held meetings with leaders, staff, pupils, governors and a representative from the local authority
- reviewed documentation including: assessment information; behaviour and attendance information; leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and plans for development; procedures and policies including those for attendance, safeguarding and special educational needs support; minutes of governors' meetings
- considered the views of the 54 parents, 72 staff and 80 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online surveys.